

peace throughout the world. Merry Christmas.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

GEORGE W. BUSH

## Statement on Signing the Combating Autism Act of 2006 *December 19, 2006*

For the millions of Americans whose lives are affected by autism, today is a day of hope. The “Combating Autism Act of 2006” will increase public awareness about this disorder and provide enhanced Federal support for autism research and treatment. By creating a national education program for doctors and the public about autism, this legislation will help more people recognize the symptoms of autism. This will lead to early identification and intervention,

which is critical for children with autism. I am proud to sign this bill into law and confident that it will serve as an important foundation for our Nation’s efforts to find a cure for autism.

NOTE: S. 843, approved December 19, was assigned Public Law No. 109–416. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

## The President’s News Conference *December 20, 2006*

*The President.* Thank you all. Good morning. This week, I went to the Pentagon for the swearing-in of our Nation’s new Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates. Secretary Gates is going to bring a fresh perspective to the Pentagon, and America is fortunate that he has agreed to serve our country once again. I’m looking forward to working with him.

Secretary Gates is going to be an important voice in the Iraq strategy review that’s underway. As you know, I’ve been consulting closely with our commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the strategy in Iraq and on the broader war on terror. One of my top priorities during this war is to ensure that our men and women wearing the uniform have everything they need to do their job.

This war on terror is the calling of a new generation; it is the calling of our gen-

eration. Success is essential to securing a future of peace for our children and grandchildren, and securing this peace for the future is going to require a sustained commitment from the American people and our military.

We have an obligation to ensure our military is capable of sustaining this war over the long haul and performing the many tasks that we ask of them. I’m inclined to believe that we need to increase in the permanent size of both the United States Army and the United States Marines. I’ve asked Secretary Gates to determine how such an increase could take place and report back to me as quickly as possible.

I know many Members of Congress are interested in this issue, and I appreciate their input. As we develop the specifics of the proposals over the coming weeks, I will not only listen to their views, we will work